



Nationwide Parcel Mapping

Issue Brief by the National States Geographic Information Council

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Problem Statement

Each unit of local and tribal government needs parcel information to track ownership, value property, collect taxes, provide services, dispatch emergency services, and manage land use and environmental issues. The United States has chosen to manage these essential activities at the local government level, and parcel mapping is critical to each activity.

Federal and state governments often need access to a digital representation of that local government parcel data, but cannot get it – either because it doesn't exist in a reliable or digital format, or is not available to them without detailed negotiations with individual counties. Some examples:

- Direct Emergency Response and Recovery. “Tax parcels and other local-source content ... are perhaps the most important geospatial assets for disaster response.... parcels establish the critical link between who, what, and where that can help guide many forms of response and recovery.” (Department of Homeland Security)¹ Parcel maps were used following Hurricane Katrina to help find and rescue survivors.
- Prevent Fraud. Following Katrina, millions of dollars of FEMA aid went to individuals who did not own property in the damaged areas.² FEMA had no good way to check for such fraud.
- Monitor the Mortgage Market. Nationwide parcel data could have been used to monitor local trends in home prices and sub-prime lending. We could have foreseen the crash and, and taken small steps to prevent the problems now affecting the entire economy.
- Manage Public Lands. Federal and state land managers need to know about neighboring property for regular or emergency communication. They also need that information for public lands planning and management and for energy development. Adjacent county records are too often inaccessible or cumbersome to use.

Nationwide data on land parcels does not exist. Federal and state land records are held by individual agencies and not easily accessible, even to those agencies themselves. Privately-held land data are maintained by county governments across the country, but only one-third of US counties have digital parcel mapping systems. This leaves nearly 2000 rural and less affluent counties without the capacity to meet their own needs, let alone the ability to share information with others. The 1000 counties with digital parcel systems cannot share data easily for two reasons: data are not in standard forms and many counties have data licensing and pricing systems.

Vision for the Future

NSGIC envisions a nationally coordinated system where parcel data are produced and maintained by local and tribal governments, as well as state and federal land management agencies. These organizations would receive technical and administrative support from state, federal, and Indian lands coordinators. Data publication will be Web-based, either through the work of these or via the actions of self-sufficient data producers. Thus, a central database is unneeded – we will have a virtual database composed of data from the various publishers. A limited set of parcel attributes (e.g., geometry, address, parcel ID) would be available nationwide in order to protect privacy; users would be required to approach individual data producers if they need more detailed information.

¹ *Supplemental Resource: Geospatial Guidance*. Homeland Security Grant Program. February 2008. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/hsgp/fy08_hsgp_guide_geospatial.pdf.

² GAO (Government Accountability Office). 2006. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Disaster Relief: Continued Findings of Fraud, Waste, and Abuse. GAO-07-252T. Available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07252t.pdf>.

Actions Required to Achieve Vision

NSGIC endorses the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report [National Land Parcel Data: A Vision for the Future](#). The report presents nine recommendations to achieve the vision:

1. Federal and National Parcel Coordinators should be established and a panel should decide whether the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should be the lead federal agency.
2. The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) should consider the parcel as a basic building block for several mandated data themes.
3. A Federal Land Parcel Coordinator should be created and empowered to deal with land parcels owned or managed by the federal government
4. A National Land Parcel Coordinator should be established to deal with non federal land parcel data.
5. An Indian Lands Parcel Coordinator should be established by the Office of Special Trustee for American Indians.
6. Congress and the Census Bureau should explore modifying Title 13 so that building addresses and coordinates can be made public.
7. State land parcel coordinators should be established in each state to develop plans and relationships with local governments.
8. An intergovernmental funding program should be developed for parcel data, including incentives to encourage participation by those counties with fully-developed systems and to provide financial support for counties without those systems.
9. Local government should put limited parcel data into the public domain. This should become a minimum requirement to be eligible for federal funds directly associated with property issues, such as disaster relief.

NSGIC's 2008 Advocacy Agenda is intended to start implementation of the National Academy report by addressing recommendations number 1, 2, 3, and 6. In addition, Congress should fund the Federal Geographic Data Committee \$295 million to initiate production, with a recurring cost of \$85 million per year, to establish a nationwide parcel database that is publicly accessible, meets the needs of local and state agencies, and provides incentives for them to participate in its development.

Who Must Be Involved

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| • Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) | • National Association of Counties (NACo) |
| • Office of Management and Budget | • National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) |
| • Department of Interior | • International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) |
| • National Geospatial Advisory Committee | |
| • Census Bureau | |
| • Congress | |

ABOUT NSGIC — The National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) is a 501 (c)(6) organization of States committed to efficient and effective government through the prudent adoption of geospatial information technologies. Members of NSGIC include delegations of state GIS coordinators and senior state GIS managers from across the United States. Other members include representatives from Federal agencies, local government, the private sector, academia and other professional organizations. A rich and diverse group, the NSGIC membership includes nationally and internationally recognized experts in GIS, geospatial data production and management, and information technology policy.

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